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THE PROGRESS OF THE BLACKFEET INDIANS.

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(By Charles H. Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs.)

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The Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Montana, is located immediately south of the Canadian border, and the winters are long and severe, the growing season being correspondingly short and the agricultural possibilities of the reservation limited. Nevertheless, the Indians of this reservation have made remarkable progress within the past two years as the result of a comprehensive five-year program adopted in the spring of 1921. This year practically every Indian family in the Heart Butte District, where most of the full-bloods reside, had a vegetable garden and small patch of grain, and many of them not only raised sufficient potatoes for their own use, but had a surplus to sell.

A flour mill was installed for the purpose of making flour from the wheat grown by the Indians. This year for the first time, not a pound of flour will be shipped in by the Government. The agency flour contract has been canceled, and the Indians will be supplied with flour made on the reservation from wheat which they themselves produced.

In 1921, the first year of the campaign, 115 Indians cultivated 3,750 acres, producing, among other things, 5,000 bushels of wheat and 1,000 bushels of potatoes. This year 476 Indians cultivated 5,975 acres, producing 7,000 bushels of wheat and 5,500 bushels of potatoes.

A sawmill was erected for the purpose of providing lumber to improve the Indian homes. An old, blind, full-blood Indian was highly elated when he heard the sawmill whistle for the first time, and said: "I was never happier in my life than when I heard the sawmill whistle blow." He also had a friend take him out into the wheat field so that he could feel the growing grain with his own hands, as he could not see it.

The total population of the reservation is slightly over 3,000 which represents an increase of 250 in the past 10 years. During the winter of 1920-21 free rations were issued to over 2,000 Indians, while last winter the number on the ration roll was less than 1,000.

A prominent club woman of Terre Haute, Indiana, visited the reservation several months ago, and after her return wrote me, in part, as follows:

> As for the fields, it is amazing what has been accomplished in the short year and one-half, which Mr. Campbell has had charge. Think of walking in wheat fields extending to my chest, and I am no weakling, oats and barley ditto. Of course, I realize that this was the product of virgin soil, but also developed under unschooled hands, except as to instruction, which must be more or less perfunctory, coming from the capacity of one man, the farmer in each district. Never in Indiana and Illinois, where we believe we can farm, have I seen such crops.
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> I walked over the gardens where hidden in the soil were great tubers, potatoes, turnips, rutabagoes, beets, onions, and cabbages all ready for the root cellar this winter.

After a visit to the reservation last July, Mr. R. H. Russell, a prominent citizen of Spokane, Washington, wrote me as follows:

> I spent eight days, driving in cars, going from one Indian home to another. I visited dozens of them. I found the inside of their homes clean, showing every evidence of being well-kept at all times. At each home nice pieces of grain (wheat and oats, wheat predominating in acreage) were to be seen which had been harvested or harvesting was under way. These grain crops are good notwithstanding nearly all of them were sown in raw sod late last spring.
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> I found the Indians and their families enjoying the best of health. Their appearance and actions were sufficient evidence that they have plenty to eat and are contented. I was out with the superintendent, Mr. F. C. Campbell, one day and we covered a large territory visiting many homes and inspecting their grain and gardens. They manifested great pride in showing Mr. Campbell the results of their combined efforts. They treated the superintendent with the greatest respect, respect almost bordering on adoration. They listened closely to all his instructions, beginning at once executing his orders with much pride. I noticed quite a rivalry among them to excell in doing things, thus bringing out the results that would be most pleasing to Mr. Campbell.
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> I have been in close touch with different Indian tribes about all my life, and I am quite sure that the Blackfeet are the most intelligent and respond more readily to uplifting influences than any tribe I have ever before observed.

General Hugh L. Scott, U. S. Army, retired, a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, also visited the reservation last fall and wrote me as follows:

I have been going about all over the Blackfeet country at the request of the superintendent, Mr. F. C. Campbell, and in his company, and I think it will please you to know the results he is accomplishing.

He is a man of great sympathy for the Indians, of untiring energy, firm and wise in his management. I see a vast difference everywhere since my last visit. The town pump from which water had heretofore been drawn by women in a Montana blizzard, a disgrace to every administration, still stands but has been replaced by an adequate water system, and two new cottages have relieved the crowded condition of the employees.

But more than all, Mr. Campbell has regenerated the spirit of the Indians. Everywhere we see crops; from 5 to 12 acres of wheat and oats; 3 or 4 of potatoes with garden produce. The flour and sawmills are in operation. The Indians show their crops with the greatest pride and joy. Mr. Campbell goes about among them for days at a time, into every field instructing and encouraging the owners. His system of organizing them into chapters in each section is bringing great results. They love and respect him highly, and he is gaining over the malcontents common to every agency who must join with him or be left behind by their own people.

He has waked up the hope and pride of the Blackfeet people, and if given sheep and supported by your Office will in the time set for the working out of his plan (five years) effect the regeneration of his people.

Without making any invidious comparisons, I may say that no tribe of Indians in the United States has made better progress during the past two years than the Blackfeet. This progress was well exemplified by their exhibition at the Montana State Fair this fall, which attracted the attention of thousands of visitors. This result has been brought about by the energetic prosecution of the industrial program outlined for the Indians of this reservation, under the leadership of Superintendent F. C. Campbell, who is a man of long and varied experience in the Indian Service, thoroughly interested in the Indians, and who is doing everything in his power to promote their welfare.

It may be of interest to mention briefly the salient features of the program. The Indians of the reservation have been organized into what is known as the "Piegan Farming and Livestock Association," the purpose of which is to promote agriculture and stock raising, to advocate a higher standard of living with better homes and farm equipment, and to promote a spirit of cooperation among the Indians.

This association is divided into 28 local chapters, each with an Indian president, vice-president, and secretary.

Each chapter is provided with farming equipment consisting of plows, harrows, seeders, mowing machines, hay rakes, and grain binders, placed in charge of the president, who becomes responsible for its disposition and care, for loan to the Indian farmers of his chapter.

The meetings of the separate chapters are held every two weeks, at which the members exchange ideas regarding farm work. There have been two general meetings of the association, as a whole, during the present year (1922), attended also by the wives of the Indian farmers, who show much interest in the program as it affects them, their children, and their homes.

One of the principal workers in the association is Bird Rattler, president of one of the local chapters. When recently interviewed through an interpreter he said:

> I am very much interested in what our people are doing, and greatly pleased with the way they are doing it, and that they will be able to get through the coming winter with plenty of food in their houses. I am now using in my house flour ground up from my last year's crop of wheat. Last year I had 3 acres of wheat and this year I doubled it, and besides had in two big patches of potatoes. ***Mr. Campbell gave us a big encouragement when he put in the flour mill, and when he furnished us with machinery it made us anxious to put in much more crops.

Besides the development along agricultural lines, the program includes getting the Indians started in the live stock industry on an individual basis. To accomplish this, each Indian is being given sufficient wire to fence a 40-acre tract, and cows, sheep, pigs, and poultry will be sold to them to be paid for in easy payments extending over a period of five years.

Last winter many of the Indians not otherwise employed earned several thousand dollars by cutting wood in the forest and hauling it to the agency, the superintendent paying them so much a cord for it. When ablebodied Indians applied to him for rations saying that they had no money and could not get work, they were afforded the opportunity of cutting the wood into stove-lengths, being paid therefor in cash.

There are, of course, many Indians on the reservation too old to work and who have no resources. In order that they may be adequately provided for, a sort of "Old Folks Colony" is being established, which consists of separate cottages for each such family, so as to simulate as far as possible the individual home life to which the occupants have been accustomed, and thus avoiding institutionalism, which the Indians do not like.

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